

# Bianca Castafiore

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**Bianca Castafiore**, the "Milanese Nightingale," is a recurring character in the comic-book series *The Adventures of Tintin* by Hergé. Her forename means "white" (feminine) in Italian, and her surname is Italian for "chaste flower". The comical Italian opera diva first appears in *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, and is also in *The Seven Crystal Balls*, *The Calculus Affair*, *The Castafiore Emerald*, *Tintin and the Picaros*, and would have appeared in the unfinished *Tintin and Alph-Art*. Although apparently one of the leading opera singers of her generation, the only thing that Castafiore is ever heard to sing are a few lines of her "signature aria," the Jewel Song, *l'air des bijoux*, from *Faust*, always at ear-splitting volume (and violent force - certainly enough to part the Captain's hair, and a breeze enough to blow back a curtain in an opera box - 'She's in fine voice tonight.'). At odds with her reputation as a leading opera singer, in *The Seven Crystal Balls*, she is appearing third on the bill of a variety show, along with a knife thrower, a magician and a clairvoyant. She is depicted as a preening, melodramatic diva, although she has a kind heart. In *The Calculus Affair*, for example, she provides a diversion to distract the sinister Colonel Sponsz so that Tintin and Captain Haddock can escape and rescue their friend Calculus. A recurring comic trope in the series is Haddock's aversion to Castafiore, who can never remember his name (addressing him variously as Hammock, Paddock, Hassock, Havoc, Maggot, and Bootblack, among other names). Ironically, gossip journalists reported a romance and engagement between Castafiore and Haddock. This quite chagrined the captain, but not the diva, who was quite used to such inventions from the tabloids. Her visit to Haddock was correctly predicted by a Gypsy fortuneteller. Thus, ancient mysticism is proven far more accurate than the modern news media.

Bianca was once falsely imprisoned by the South American dictator General Tapioca, in order to lure Calculus, Haddock and Tintin to San Theodoros where they prepare a deadly trap for them and Tapioca's rival, General Alcazar. The ruse backfired for Tapioca and the Bordurians who were backing his regime - not least because Bianca expresses her contempt of her show trial and her unjust life sentence with her trademark ear-splitting rendition of the Jewel Song. The court has to be cleared. In prison, Bianca makes her jailers suffer even more by throwing her pasta over their heads because they do not cook it al dente.

Unsurprisingly, opera was one of Hergé's pet hates. Helsingin Sanomat suggested in October 2008 that Castafiore was modelled after Aino Ackte, a Finnish soprano. It is also curious that though la Castafiore is obviously Italian, her pet aria is from a French opera (*Faust* was composed by Charles Gounod) rather than the Verdi, Puccini, or Donizetti one would expect from a star of the La Scala.

- The asteroid 1683 Castafiore, discovered in 1950, is named after the character.

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